

SUMERAL DENNIS.

FEBRUARY 24, 1910.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. JOHNSTON, from the Committee on Military Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT.

[To accompany S. 6496.]

The papers in this case show a remarkable story. It appears, from resolutions adopted by Tehopka Lodge, No. 71, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, Dadeville, Ala., adopted July 17, 1886, and other sources, that Sumeral Dennis was born in York district, South Carolina, May 28, 1784, and soon after attaining his majority moved to Alabama, settled in the city of Montgomery, and subsequently removed to Tallapoosa County (Dadeville). The resolutions recite that he was a man of—

strong constitution and fine physical form, but he added length of days to his life by being strictly temperate in his habits; that he served his country faithfully in the Mexican war and one of the Indian wars and was an American veteran worthy of honorable mention and the esteem of his fellow-man in the war of 1812. He was a man of good moral character and a member of the Congregational Church. That he was made an entered apprentice Mason on March 3, 1853, a fellow-craft Mason, and, on May 7 following, a master Mason. That he died on the 25th of June, 1886.

Resolutions of condolence and for the usual badge of mourning followed, and were published in the county papers. A certified copy is in the file in this case. (Exhibit A.)

The letter of the Adjutant-General, February 21, 1910, shows that Sumeral Dennis enlisted in Capt. Jona Beatty's company, First (Means) Regiment of South Carolina Militia, January 15, and that he died February 21, 1815. (Exhibit B.)

Notwithstanding his death on February 21, 1815, the records of the War Department show that Sumeral Dennis was enrolled May 4, 1836, and mustered into service May 26, 1836, as a private in Captain Brodnax's company, Tallahassee Guards, Alabama Volunteers, to serve three months, and no record of him is found later on the muster roll of the company. (See letter of Adjutant-General, August 20, 1909, Exhibit C.)

Notwithstanding his death in 1815 and disappearance in 1836, Sumeral Dennis again turns up when another war occurred, and it is

shown on the records of the War Department that he was enrolled June 2, 1846, at Mobile, Ala., and was mustered into the service of the United States on the same day as captain of a company in the First Regiment of Alabama Volunteers, war with Mexico, to serve six months. He seems to have been a pretty lively corpse and to have been promoted for his past services and experience from private to captain. (Letter of Adjutant-General, dated Aug. 9, 1909, Exhibit D.)

Sumeral appears to have filed a claim for bounty land under the act of September 28, 1850, alleging service in Captain Beatty's company, war of 1812, and Captain Brodnax's company in 1836. The third auditor, under date of April 10, 1852, says: "Sumeral Dennis served under Captain Beatty from October 1, 1814, to March 4, 1815." The records seem to be considerably mixed, because if this were true he could not have died February 21, 1815, nor have filed his claim for bounty land in 1852.

On October 11, 1883, Sumeral, not discouraged by having been officially killed, again filed a declaration in which he alleged that he served in Captain Eaday's company (probably meant for Beatty) as a substitute for Thomas Dennis, which is shown by the records of the War Department (Adjutant-General's letter, Feb. 21, 1910), and was discharged when peace was declared at Trent.

Thomas Dennis turned up about that time, 1852, with a claim for bounty land, says he—

furnished a substitute in his place in the person of his brother Sumeral, who was then there fully accepted by the proper authorities as such substitute, who continued to serve until his death, which was about the end of the service for which he was substituted.

It will be observed that Sumeral removed to Alabama shortly after his service in Captain Beatty's company, and no doubt Thomas thought he was dead; and whilst he was helping kill him that it was just as well to fix the date of his demise so that it would assist him in his (Thomas's) claim for bounty then pending.

All the facts in this paragraph (3) are shown by the letter of the Commissioner of Pensions, January 13, 1910.

So convinced was the Commissioner of Pensions that Sumeral Dennis did not die in 1815 and that the record thereof was erroneous, that he wrote the Adjutant-General calling attention to the similarity of the signatures of Dennis to his applications filed in 1873 and 1883 and to this signature as a private in Captain Beatty's company, using this language—

that in view of the statements of claimant, Sumeral Dennis, in his applications filed in 1873 and 1883, relative to his service and the similarity between his signature on those dates and the tracings of the signatures of the soldier furnished by the Adjutant-General taken from the rolls of Captain Beatty's company, South Carolina Militia, this bureau has this day forwarded said applications to the Adjutant-General for his consideration and for a report showing whether the record of his service can be amended so as to show his discharge from said service as claimed by the soldier, instead of the fact that he died February 15, 1815. (See letter of Commissioner Davenport of January 13, 1910, Exhibit E.)

The Adjutant-General, of course, had no authority to make this change, and could not do so. Hence this bill authorizing and directing it.

The Adjutant-General has furnished this committee tracings of Sumeral Dennis's signatures as it appears on the rolls of Captain

Beatty's company, and as it appears on the rolls of the First Alabama Volunteers, and there is submitted herewith these tracings (Exhibit F) and certified copies of signatures of Sumeral Dennis (Exhibit C) sent from Dadeville, Ala., one in March, 1876, being to a promissory note for the pitiful sum of \$11.50 payable ten days after date, and the other a mortgage to secure payment for 1 ton fertilizer in 1874, and the signatures, like those mentioned by the Commissioner of Pensions, seem to show that exactly the same man made them.

Dennis was born in 1784, enlisted in the war of 1812 when 31 years old; joined Captain Brodnax's company in the Indian war of 1836 when 52 years old, and the Mexican war when 62, and died 102 years old. Truly the Masons were correct in saying that he was a man of "strong constitution and fine physical form." He answered every call of his country to arms, lived respected by his neighbors, and died a poor man.

Sumeral Dennis was well known in Alabama. To show this, in a book published in the fifties, entitled *The Widow Rugby's Husband and other Tales*, by a distinguished Alabamian—Johnson J. Hooper—who was solicitor (state's attorney) for the circuit in which Sumeral Dennis lived, the scene of the first story is laid at the Union Hotel, kept by Sumeral Dennis, Dadeville, Ala. The writer says:

The house took its name from the complexion of the politics of its proprietor, he being a true-hearted Union man and opposed at all points to the damnable heresy of nullification. * * * Glorious fellow was Sumeral! Capital landlady was his good wife, in all the amplitude of her embonpoint. Well-behaved children, too, were Sumeral's, from the shaggy and red-headed representative of paternal peculiarities down to little Solomon of the sable locks, whose "favour" puzzled the neighbors and set at defiance all known physiological principles. Good people all were the Dennis. May a hungry man never fall among worse.

In view of the facts herein stated, the committee think this bill should have favorable consideration and this soldier of three wars have his record made to speak the truth.

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